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Letters to the Editor

Re-escalating the Vietnam War

To the Editor:

So low is the credibility of an American President today that Richard Nixon can mislead and lull the American public in the very process of telling them exactly what he means to do, and doing it.

Confident that he will not be believed by Americans, Mr. Nixon has promised that he will keep as many United States troops in Vietnam as are needed by our Saigon "allies" until Hanoi and the National Liberation Front meet his conditions for a "just peace," which amount to their concession of defeat. In other words, large numbers of United States troops will remain in Vietnam so long as he is in office.

Again hoping to be heard by Hanoi but tuned out by most Americans, he has threatened repeatedly to re-escalate the war when his Vietnamese opponents resist this prolonged American occupation, as they are virtually sure to do. He has acted steadily upon these threats. We should believe him.

Moreover, except for the recent renewal of the bombing of North Vietnam (launched with a replay of the Tonkin Gulf "reprisal"), each of his escalations—the invasion of Cambodia, expansion of United States air attacks throughout Laos and Cambodia, and now a ground incursion deep into North Vietnam—has demonstrated that he will not be bound by restraints that limited even the massive though ineffective "pressures" applied by Lyndon Johnson.

His spokesmen pointedly refuse to admit any limit at all to the violent measures he feels free to use without consulting Congress, or is willing to justify as "protecting the lives of American troops."

Thus, current U.S. attacks are only warnings of what the North Vietnamese can expect from their continued "obduracy" after United States troops are reduced to their semipermanent levels, probably between 100,000 to 200,000 men. Remaining measures, long urged by the military (and in some cases by Nixon himself) include mining Haiphong, interference with Soviet

shipping and interdiction attacks along the Chinese border and the destruction of Hanoi and Haiphong.

The recent abortive commando raid foretells even "limited" invasions of North Vietnam. What else could have been the contingency plan for rescuing the "search and rescue" team itself, if it had been pinned down last weekend? When all such measures fail, a full-scale invasion aimed at Hanoi, or the threat and possible use of nuclear weapons, could be "contingencies" whose time has come.

Nixon's clearly announced and demonstrated strategy entails not only prolonging but vastly expanding this immoral, illegal and unconstitutional war.

American casualties may decline, unless we invade the North. Yet the price of thus protecting Nixon from his fear of charges, borrowed from his own past, of "losing Indochina to Communism," will be millions more refugees and hundreds of thousands of more dead in Indochina, many more thousands of American dead, and the moral degradation of our country.

To refuse any longer, wishfully, to believe that Nixon really means what he says and does, or to fail to resist his policy, is to become an accomplice.

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Cambridge, Mass., Nov. 26, 1970

This letter has been endorsed by a group of Massachusetts Institute of Technology faculty members headed by Dr. Salvador Luria.

